

# Birdshooting Season

Matthew Williams • English Literature • March 18, 2026

## Birdshooting Season

Birdshooting season the men  
make marriages with their guns

*Analysis: The metaphor "make marriages with their guns" suggests an intimate, almost sacred bond between the men and their weapons. It implies that masculinity is defined through violence and control, replacing emotional or human connection.*

My father's house turns macho  
as from far the hunters gather

*Analysis: The house "turns macho," reflecting how the presence of men amplifies aggressive, hypermasculine energy. The gathering suggests ritual, reinforcing this as a cultural performance of masculinity.*

All night long contentless women  
stir their brews: hot coffee  
chocolata, cerassie

*Analysis: The word "contentless" suggests suppressed dissatisfaction. While not openly resistant, the women are emotionally unfulfilled, highlighting silent inequality within the domestic role.*

wrap pone and tie-leaf  
for tomorrow's sport. Tonight  
the men drink white rum neat.

*Analysis: The contrast between preparation and indulgence reinforces gender imbalance. The men consume and celebrate, while the women labor without recognition, sustaining the system that sidelines them.*

In darkness shouldering  
their packs, their guns, they leave

*Analysis: The imagery presents the men as almost militaristic. Carrying guns in darkness suggests a ritualized departure into violence, elevating hunting to something more serious and symbolic.*

We stand quietly on the  
doorstep shivering.

*Analysis: The children are physically and emotionally distanced. "Doorstep" suggests a boundary, while "shivering" reflects vulnerability and exclusion from male power.*

Little boys  
longing to grow up birdhunters too

*Analysis: The boys internalize the ritual, showing how masculinity is socially constructed and passed down. They aspire to replicate the same behaviors, continuing the cycle.*

Little girls whispering

Fly Birds Fly.

*Analysis: The phrase functions as symbolism "Fly Birds Fly", representing resistance and empathy. The girls align themselves with the birds, identifying with vulnerability rather than dominance, quietly opposing the cultural norm.*

## About the poem

**Author:** Olive Senior (1941– )

**Context:** Caribbean cultural setting where bird hunting functions as a traditional male ritual that reinforces gender roles

**Core idea:** Cultural traditions normalize masculinity as dominance and violence, while women are confined to silent labor and emotional suppression, with these roles passed down through childhood socialization.

- **Main themes**

- Gender roles and expectations
- Masculinity and dominance
- Cultural tradition and ritual
- Childhood socialization
- Power and control
- Empathy vs violence

- **Mood:** Reflective and uneasy, with an underlying tension created by imbalance and exclusion

- **Tone:** Nostalgic yet subtly critical, exposing gender norms without direct confrontation